

Bumper Cranberry Harvest Faces Record Low Prices Per Barrel

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Three years ago local cranberry growers would be celebrating this season's anticipated bountiful crop but that's when they could expect a return of about \$86 per barrel as opposed to something in the expected \$20 range this year.

Conservation Administrator Joe Grady said this week that most growers say that it costs them about \$40 a barrel to grow the cranberries so most will have to try and ride out another season of poor return on their crop.

Last year, growers faced prices of about \$35 or less and some independent growers have yet to be paid by distribu-

tors.

Problems in the cranberry industry have been attributed to a glut of cranberries and not enough market development.

The town owns 51 acres of cranberry bogs and leases the acreage to growers who bid for the right to cultivate the bogs and return revenue to the town.

As independents they sell to distributors including Northland, Decas Bros. and Hiller. Others including Merryland and Loring are part of the Ocean Spray Cooperative and while they, too, are suffering from a dip in the market, will be paid for their crop.

Grady said some indepen-

dents could be stuck with their crop if they can't find a distributor to market them or have to wait and see if they will be paid.

The interruption of cash flow when growers have bills to pay can put some out of business.

Chris Geldmacher grows berries at his own bogs off Temple St. and for the town at 39 acres he leases off East St. The town also owns 7 acres off Cherry Lane managed by Black Cat, Inc. and five acres off Church Street.

Grady said the town may be forced to rebid the cranberry

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contracts depending on the return this year. He said the town is still waiting for payments from last year from some distributors.

Dry picking has already started at bogs on Mayflower and East Streets and wet har-

vesting should be in full swing over the next few weeks.

Grady said it is not inconceivable that some local growers may reevaluate their ability to stay in the business particularly when return on a barrel (100 pounds of berries) is half of what it cost to grow them.